Water Baskets, Traps and Brooms

Traditional crafts in Nova Scotia

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Nova Scotia

Department of
Education

Withe Baskets, Traps and Brooms

Traditional crafts in Nova Scotia

Joleen Gordon
Photographs by Ronald E. Merrick

Nova Scotia Museum
Halifax, Nova Scotia
1984

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Dedicated to the memory of
James Bernard Mossman, 1907-1983.
Russell Langille, 1903-1983.

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"The man in the moon was put there for cutting withes on a Sunday."

Helen Creighton, *Bluenose Magic*

Nova Scotia has a rich heritage of traditional crafts, one of which is basketry. In the province today, there are three groups of traditional basketmakers — the Micmac Indians, the Blacks, and a small number of fishermen, each using different materials and weaving techniques to make their own style of container.

Ash is the preferred wood of the Micmac weavers, although they also use maple and poplar. The logs are quartered, the heartwood removed, and the wood is pounded or shaved into long, thin flexible strips or splints of varying widths which are interwoven into functional or decorative baskets.

The Black weavers use only red maple saplings. With hunting knives or jack-knives, the wood is halved and quartered. It is then split along the growth lines into heavier pieces for handles and rims and into thinner ribbon-like strips for weaving. The circular handle and rim, bound together at their intersection in a characteristic cross, together with the many ribs inserted into this cross, form the framework of the Black market basket.

The third group of basketweavers, the fishermen, use the long, slender pliant shoots, 'withes', of a variety of woodland plants, primarily Witherod, to make their garden baskets, clamming baskets, and eel traps. The baskets are woven with oval or circular bottoms and straight or bowed sides, then fitted with handles of twisted rods. The traps are conical-shaped pots with an inner funnel leading into a central chamber. In both containers, the weaving is done either with single, double, or triple withes in a variety of twisting patterns.

The knowledge of how all these artifacts are made has been passed on through oral tradition or by one person teaching another. The Micmac Indians, the largest group of basketmakers in the province, have active instruction programs. The Black basketry tradition has recently been documented[1] and, although it is not as strong as it was fifty years ago, the interest is still evident in the community. The withe basketmakers are in a different position. While they may outnumber the Black weavers, they live in separated communities along the eastern and southern shores of Nova Scotia. These weavers tend to work in isolation. They seldom, if ever, meet to exchange ideas.

This book is a study of Nova Scotian withe basketry and its makers. It is an attempt to record the social history these baskets represent, the weaving techniques and materials used, and step-by-step instructions. With regard to the instructions, it must be noted that a weaver may alter his weaving slightly, depending on the amount of material he was able to collect, the size of the

shoots, and the spacing of the weave. Seldom does a traditional craftsman make two artifacts exactly the same; yet the weaving techniques found in these baskets are the same as those used by weavers centuries ago.

Because of the abundance of material available, the limited preparation needed, and the simplicity of their construction, these baskets are relatively quick and easy to make. For this reason they are considered to have been the earliest form of basketry.[2]

Weaving techniques for these baskets have been documented around the world,[3] but only a few variations are found in Nova Scotia today. One of these, the 'wicker-weave', consists of a plain 'over-one, under-one' weave using a single weaving element, or weft (Fig. 1).[4] A second and more common technique in the province is 'twining', employing two or three weft elements twisted in clockwise half-turns between each upright, or warp, element (Figs. 2 and 3).[5] A third technique, 'slewing', is similar to wicker but two or more weft elements are used simultaneously (Fig. 4).[6] In Nova Scotia, these techniques have been found in the construction of both baskets and eel traps. Sometimes a weaver may use a combination of techniques, weaving the bottom of a basket in double-twining and the sides in a pattern of double- and triple-twining.

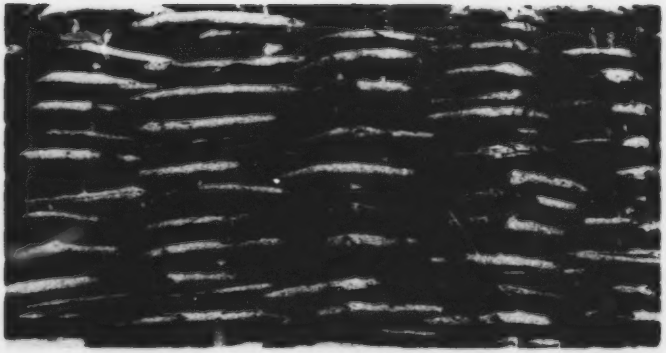


Figure 1. The plain 'over-one, under-one' weave known as 'wicker' in a contemporary Witherod eel trap woven by Carl Pettipas of East Chezzetcook, Halifax County. Cole Harbour Historical Society collection.

Figure 2. Two-strand 'twining' in a contemporary Witherod basket woven by Victor Bush of LaHave, Lunenburg County. Private collection.

The terminology of this style of basketry is at times confusing, and requires clarification. The word 'wicker' can be used to define a technique, or it may refer to the material used in the basket's construction. The two usages of this word may be explained by its double derivation: one as a verb, from the Anglo-Saxon *wiccan*, meaning 'to bend'; another as a noun, from the Swedish *vikker*, meaning 'willow'. Here, however, 'wicker' will refer to a weaving technique.

Baskets woven of the pliant shoots of woody shrubs and young trees have been described as 'withy' and 'withe' baskets, both words derived from the Old English *widthe*, meaning any tough flexible twig or stem suitable for binding things together. In England today, 'withy' usually refers to shoots of osier or basket willow (*Salix* sp.). In Nova Scotia, the words 'withe' and 'wit' are used synonymously to refer to the young pliable shoots of several woodland plants, including alder (*Alnus* sp.), Red Osier Dogwood (*Cornus stolonifera*), birch (*Betula* sp.), cherry (*Prunus* sp.), elder (*Sambucis* sp.), willow (*Salix* sp.), and Witherod (*Viburnum cassinoides*). Another term, 'Indian wit', is used to refer solely to Witherod.[7] In this study, the word 'withe' will be used to describe the flexible shoots as well as the basketwork woven of such material.

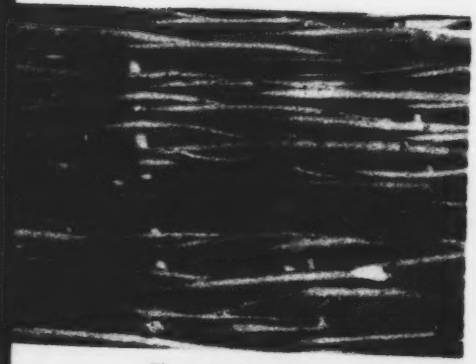


Figure 3. Three-strand 'twining' in a contemporary Witherod eel pot woven by Russell Langille of Oakland, Lunenburg County. Private collection.

Figure 4. The 'slewing' technique in a food hamper woven of alder shoots, using two or more pieces of wood in each row of weaving. Nova Scotia Museum collection, Ross Farm Museum.

Figure 5. *Viburnum cassinoides*, commonly known as Witherod, with the young leaves in the 'moose-ear' stage.

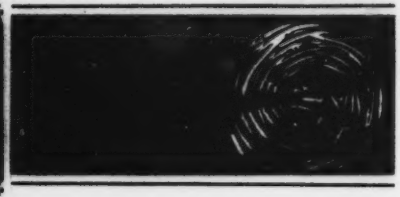
Figure 6. Witherod in bloom around mid-May, in central Nova Scotia. Photo: J. Gordon.

Of all the withes suitable for weaving, Witherod is the most popular in Nova Scotia.[8] This may be due to the fact that this member of the honeysuckle family grows quickly. It has long unbranching shoots which, even after two or three year's growth, can be easily bent and twisted without breaking.

In the early spring, its paired, soft, brown-coloured leaves are in what is called by some the 'moose-ear' stage (Fig. 5), which is followed by a brief flowering period, when the bush is covered with clusters of small white blossoms (Fig. 6). After that, the plant has little to distinguish it from the many other woodland shrubs until the early fall. Then, the bush has clusters of berries ranging in colour from cream to pink, which later change to dark purple.

The withes for weaving are usually cut in the early spring before the plant comes into full leaf. The sticks are cut with a sharp knife at their butt ends close to the ground, and then trimmed of any short branches. They *can* be cut year-round, but in the spring the previous year's growth has reached its full length without branching, the sap has not yet risen to make the work sticky, and there is not the additional chore of removing the leaves. For the finer household baskets, the withes are cut a little later in the spring when the rising sap loosens the bark, making the peeling easier. The Witherod sticks are either woven freshly cut or stored in a cool damp place for a few weeks; they must, however, be used before they become too dry and brittle for weaving.

All of the weavers contacted in this study used Witherod. When they could not find suitable Witherod withes, some of the men substituted the shorter and rougher alder or cherry withes.



There have been several common styles of withe basket characterized by the shape of the base: round, oval, or rectangular. Only the round-based baskets are woven in Nova Scotia. Basically, a basket made with a circular bottom has two sets of three rods intersecting at their centres. They radiate to form the elements around which the finer withes are woven using a variety of wicker and twining techniques. The sides of the basket are formed by rods inserted into the bottom weave and then bent up to create the framework for weaving. The border may be finished off in a wide variety of twisting patterns. In some of the heavy-duty baskets, a rim is woven onto the bottom to raise it off the ground to prevent rot. Handles are added last, either one stretching across the basket, or two smaller ones, one on each side.

Early records mentioning withe basketry in Nova Scotia are almost non-existent, and views of early artists showing baskets of various types must be carefully considered in the light of the artist's background and experience.[9] Information regarding the aboriginal use of this style of basketry is limited, but it is still possible to find strong links between baskets introduced by European settlers with artifacts in museum collections and those being woven in the province today.

Seventeenth-century European accounts described Micmac Indian containers and household articles of woven grasses, reeds, roots, and cordage. They may have also used withes to make baskets. Contemporary burial sites have revealed fragments showing the Indians were familiar with twine weaving. Russell Harper described two variations of twining, one in which the two wefts twisted around each consecutive warp strand in each row producing a close weave, and another in which the two wefts grouped alternating pairs of warps in spaced rows producing a diamond pattern in a more open weave.[10]

Marc Lescarbot sailed from France in the spring of 1606 with de Monts. In his chronicle of life in the new settlement of Port Royal, he described the Indians making 'boats' with ". . . willows very properly, which they cover with the said gum of fir trees."[11] This evidence suggests they may have been familiar with wicker weaving. Although there are no surviving examples of these boats, they sound very similar to the coracles which have been woven in Europe for many centuries. These small circular boats are constructed by driving stakes in the ground in the outline of a circle, wicker-weaving them close to the ground with finer shoots, and then bending the unwoven sticks over each other to form the

bottom framework which is left to dry. Later, the intersections are lashed together, taken out of the ground, the remaining withes interwoven for the rim, and the whole covered with hide or canvas and sealed with pitch (Fig. 7). The boats are manoeuvred by a single stern paddler.

Nicolas Denys, the French trader who established the settlement of St. Peter's in Cape Breton, also described the Micmac people while he was in the province (1633-1681). Both Lescarbot and Denys mention the Micmac use of fish weirs.[12] It is possible that these were constructed of wicker-woven branches and shoots around a framework of poles driven into the mud, similar to the twentieth-century Micmac weirs.

In constructing this weir, which was from fifty to a hundred feet in length, the first step was to drive vertical sticks, about three feet apart, into the mud. They were then interwoven by a man who stood in the water. The intertwining was done at the surface, and the branches were pushed down, layer by layer, until the work was completed.[13]

No pre-European examples of withe basketry have yet been found in Nova Scotia. However, since the Micmacs were both familiar with weaving techniques and surrounded by appropriate materials, it is possible they were making withe baskets long before 1600. It is not until the nineteenth century that there is a possible reference to this style of basketry. In 1863, the English Lieutenant and sportsman Campbell Hardy described the Micmacs carrying "... a hundredweight of moose by a withy of Withrod or yellow birch".[14] The word 'withy' was also used to refer to a carrying strap of long strands of wood fibre or shoots twisted together, so this evidence is not conclusive.[15]

By the twentieth century, however, the Micmac Indians were certainly making withe basketry for their own use and to sell. One of their words for these containers — *tupsi* — referred specifically to alder, although it is now used for any withe basket.

Figure 7. Launching a coracle on the River Boyne. The hull is made of a willow framework, wicker-woven near the gunnel and covered with canvas. Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, Holywood, Northern Ireland. Photo: W. A. Green.

8 Sixteenth Century Fishermen

In the late sixteenth century, fishermen from Europe discovered the abundance of fish in the waters off the coasts of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia.[16] They often spent entire summers fishing in this area, setting up camps on shore to dry their catch before returning home for the winter. For carrying the fish, they may have used baskets like the ones in Figure 8. According to Denys, in his 1672 account, fishermen were extracting cod-liver oil by solar heating the livers in wooden boxes with one side woven of ". . . wicker or basket-work" through which the liquid filtered.[17] They also used woven trays to clean the fish, as seen in Figure 9.

Figure 8. 'Scene in the Bay of Annapolis, from Digby' by William Henry Bartlett, engraving, 1842. Public Archives of Canada C-2411.

Figure 9. Composite view of the Newfoundland cod fishery from the Moll 'Map of North America According to Ye Newest and most Exact Observations . . . Herman Moll. Geographer', c.1710, engraving. Note the large woven tray (H) in which the fish are being cleaned. Maritime Museum of the Atlantic.

Permanent European settlement of Nova Scotia did not occur until the beginning of the seventeenth century when de Monts established the first French colony at Port Royal in 1604. French fishermen also settled temporarily in several localities along the southern and eastern shores of the province. The Habitation at Port Royal was primarily agricultural and the settlers presumably brought with them their farming tools, familiar seeds and grains, as well as their farming traditions. They may also have brought their basketry. Although we have no Nova Scotian examples from this period, France has had two main basketry traditions: coiled-straw and woven-willow.[18] The willow withes are cultivated especially for making baskets, and are woven into containers of various shapes and functions. The techniques used by the French weavers are the same as those used by most other European basketmakers, including the English. According to Dorothy Wright, the English basketry researcher, the reason for the universality of patterns and weaves is that baskets were carried abroad by so many of the early travellers and traders.[19]

There are few species of willow native to Nova Scotia, and their short brittle rods make them unsuitable for weaving. Over the years, several willows have been introduced from Europe. Although it is difficult to determine the country of origin or dates of entry of these species, it is interesting to note that *Salix alba* is commonly referred to as the 'French Willow'.[20] Such plants may have been imported for ornamental purposes alone, but it is worth noting that several of these species are being commercially grown today in Europe solely for the production of basketry rods. The basketmakers among those early French settlers gradually began to discover which woodland plants could be substituted for willow. Perhaps the Micmacs instructed them.

The English made their first permanent settlement in Nova Scotia when they founded Halifax in 1749. In a series of early nineteenth-century drawings, the English artist, W. H. Pyne, showed the rural context from which many of these settlers would have come, and their use of basketry (Fig. 10). The materials employed by English basketmakers included rushes and willow, with an emphasis on the latter. Extensive willow beds are still cultivated in the southwest part of the country for the basket trade. The rods were used to weave in two distinct styles: the 'frame' or 'ribbed' baskets woven by a small group of farmers and fishermen,[21] and the more popular 'stake-and-strand' baskets woven by a great many country folk and professional weavers all over Britain.[22] The latter were very similar in construction to the French baskets, as can be seen from Pyne's drawings. British fishermen also used several styles of withe traps for catching fish (Fig. 11), crabs, and lobsters. In the beginning, the colonists may have brought such artifacts with them, then reproduced them here as they were needed.[23]

When the Duke of Kent served in Halifax (1794-1800) as Commander-in-Chief of His Majesty's Forces in North America, he devised the first visual telegraph system on this continent (Fig. 12). The telegraph employed large woven balls hung from a masthead in various positions and combinations with flags, drums, and pennants. Not much is known about the exact construction of these balls, except that they were described as made "of wicker like a Baskett"[24] and were painted black, presumably with tar, to make them visible at a distance.[25] It is doubtful that these basketwork balls were imported from England when there were people with weaving knowledge living in the colony — for the population included not only soldiers but civilians, with occupations and trades from both rural and urban environments.

Figure 10. Market scenes in early nineteenth-century England showing the use of baskets, W. H. Pyne, 1977, Plate 20.

Figure 11. English wicker fish traps or 'putchers'. The poles in the background are used to build a barricade in the water to hold the traps in position. Institute of Agricultural History and Museum of English Rural Life, University of Reading, England.

Figure 12. 'Halifax from Fort Clarence', by J. E. Woolford, 1817, showing the signal apparatus. Nova Scotia Museum collection.

The Irish and Scots also settled in Nova Scotia, bringing with them their basketry traditions. Both groups wove similar willow containers.[26] Rough willow rods were woven into peat carriers worn by men and women, or into peat panniers worn by the farm animals (Fig. 13). Shoots were also woven into a variety of garden baskets, storage containers, fishing creels, and 'peat kishes' on slide cars hauled by donkeys and horses (Fig. 14). The weaving techniques were generally the same as those already described, except that in several of the carrying baskets (Fig. 15) the framework rods are cut off, rather than woven into the rim. This style of basket is very similar to one of unknown origin in the Nova Scotia Museum collection (Fig. 16).

Figure 13. Twine-woven donkey creels from Donegal. Ulster Folk and Transport Musuem, Holywood, North Ireland, Photo: W. A. Green.

Figure 14. Slide car with a willow turf basket, showing both a twine and a wicker weave. Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, Holywood, Northern Ireland. Photo: W. A. Green.

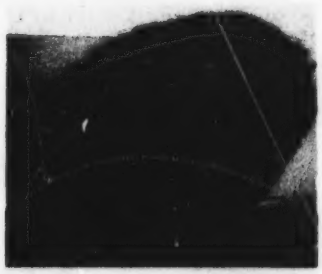


Figure 15. Peat creel or potato basket from Wester Ross. Made of wicker-woven hazel and heather root. Highland Folk Museum, Kingussie, Scotland.

The Scottish and Irish shepherds used a wool basket, a football-shaped container with a small centrally-placed hole. It was called a *mudag*, Gaelic for 'wren's nest', because of its shape. Baskets like this have been collected in both Nova Scotia and Ontario. In the early days of settlement, when the flocks of sheep were small, every bit of fleece was precious. The wool basket was carried on a shoulder strap by the shepherd and as he tended his flocks, he gathered stray pieces of fleece and stored them in his basket.[27]

Of the two wool baskets found in Nova Scotia, the one from Cape Breton Island is spherical, while the one collected in Pictou County has a flat side, presumably for ease of carrying (Fig. 17). Oral histories do not mention this basket ever being woven in the province, but Florence Mackley has described the making of the one example in her collection.

The thicker rods of willow that formed the framework were placed in the ground and lighter rods were woven in and out and round and round. As the work progressed, the frame of upright rods were [sic] drawn inwards or outwards to make the desired shape. A gap was left in the side.[28]

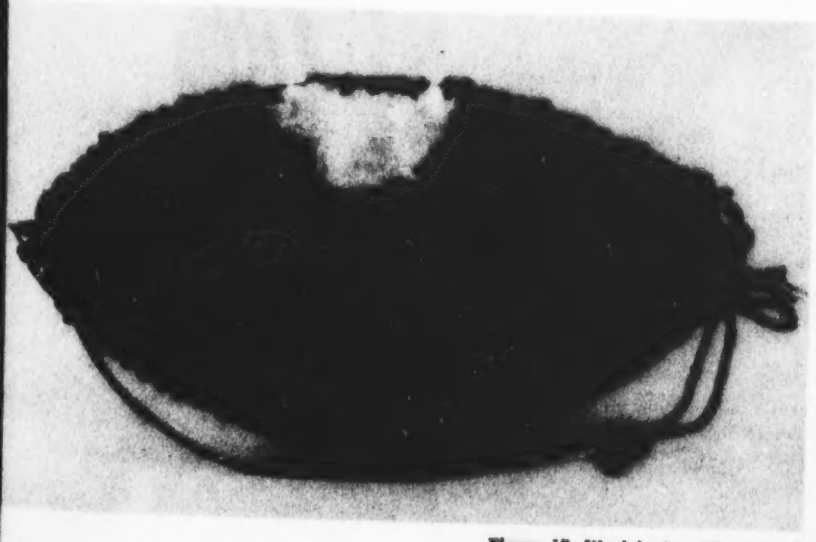


Figure 17. Wool basket. Weaver and date unknown. The shape is a hemisphere with one side flat to lie against the body. Private collection.

Figure 16. Wicker-woven basket believed to have originated in Nova Scotia. Weaver and date unknown. Note the similarity of construction to the basket in Figure 15. Nova Scotia Museum 72.351.3.

German settlers first came to Nova Scotia in 1750-1752. The majority of them initiated a new farming settlement in what is now Lunenburg County, some distance down the South Shore from Halifax. In 1751, a list of settlers included a skilled basket-weaver.[29] The German basketry traditions included the coiled-straw baskets[30] and the woven-willow.[31] Both styles of basketry have been collected in the county, although the withe baskets were more popular. Local histories make reference to the use of Witherod baskets[32] and the area is well known today for its numerous withe basketmakers.[33] The German people also settled in what is now the Blandford Peninsula and the Eastern Passage areas of Halifax County,[34] both of which have a history of withe basket manufacture. These areas were also settled by the British, however, and the similarity of the two withe-basketry techniques makes it impossible to state the exact ethnic origin of any piece found there today.

Some of the Black settlers who came to Nova Scotia at the beginning of the nineteenth century brought their basketry skills. Although they are best known for their maple-splint baskets, the pictorial evidence seems to demonstrate their use of withe basketry, as in the 1872 newspaper illustration of Black women selling mayflowers in the Halifax Market (Fig. 18). Oral tradition says that in the early twentieth century, some of the men at Cherry Brook in Halifax County were weaving Witherod baskets for their own use, and occasionally for sale at the city market.[35]

Figure 18. 'Halifax, N.S. Negresses Selling Mayflowers in the Market Place'. Note the use of withe baskets, rather than the ribbed basket usually associated with the Black culture. *Canadian Illustrated News*, 25 May 1872, V:325. Public Archives of Canada C-58626.

Soon after the founding of Halifax, a weekly market was established near the site of the ferry landing.[36] Farmers of Acadian, British, and German descent living in the Eastern Passage, Cole Harbour, and Chezzetcook areas made the long trek by horse and wagon to the ferry dock in Dartmouth, then crossed the harbour by boat to sell their garden produce and seashore gatherings of periwinkles and clams. Black farmers from the Cherry Brook/Lake Loon/Preston area, as well as those from the settlements near Hammond's Plains, came with their homegrown vegetables and seasonal woodland gatherings of sweet fern, mayflowers, and blueberries. Micmac Indians travelled from their encampments near Tuft's Cove and farther inland to sell their splint baskets, quillwork boxes, and butter tubs. The atmosphere of the market was recorded in an 1889 newspaper report.

At the 'Green Market'

Ere the morning mists have cleared away there may be witnessed on this occasion one of the most motly and picturesque conventions that ever was seen upon a market square. It is a gathering that is certainly unique, for its prototype cannot be found anywhere else in the land. Assembled on the square and along the streets contiguous to it will be found rugged farmers and their stout, good-natured looking wives intrenched behind a perfect fortress of garden truck of every description, from a prize squash to a bunch of marigolds.[37]

Figure 19. Detail of a Notman photograph of the Halifax City Market c.1880, showing the Indian and Black baskets. Public Archives of Nova Scotia.

Figure 20. 'Basket Vendors, Halifax'. Note the Indian splint baskets in the background, among the more familiar ribbed baskets woven by the Black weavers. Archives of Ontario. Photo: M. O. Hammond, 1907.

The market was a lively place. Here visitors could purchase fresh vegetables, fish, and meats or "Brooms, baskets, tubs, clothes-props, peasticks, hop- and bean-poles, rustic seats and flower boxes . . ."[38] One could choose from ". . . a bewildering array of baskets filled with berries of every known description . . ."[39]

Most of these market vendors had one thing in common — a knowledge of basketry. They all used baskets, and a few of them wove. Photographs of the market taken between 1880 and 1920 show that the various ethnic groups often used one another's type of basket (Figs. 19 and 20). It is quite possible that a few of the basketweavers may have tried to weave with another's type of material and manufacturing technique. This would explain the existence of some of the European-style withe baskets attributed to Micmac and Black weavers (Figs. 21, 22, and 23).

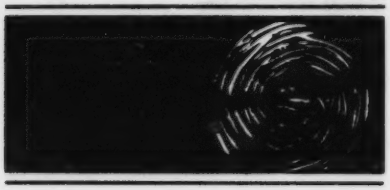
From the preceding discussion, it can be seen that Nova Scotia has a long history of withe basketry, with many different cultural groups utilizing a variety of woodland materials to construct containers used in their everyday lives. At the present time in the province there are no known Black or Micmac basketmakers using withes. In a few isolated communities along the South and Eastern Shores, however, there are still people of European descent weaving baskets and eel traps, either wholly of Witherod or in combination with other withes of alder, willow, or cherry.

Figure 21. Undated twine-woven basket thought to be of Micmac manufacture, using peeled and unpeeled elder shoots. Note the similarity to European withe baskets in shape, tightness of weave and handle construction. The bottom framework is also the same. This basket differs, however, in that it has a single rim construction, the base is flat, and it lacks a protective woven foot. Nova Scotia Museum Z89.

Figure 22. This wicker-woven basket shows European influences in its general style, rim and handle construction, and most especially in the arrangement of bottom-framework sticks (see Figure 23). The container lacks a protective foot around its rather uneven base. Purchased at the Halifax market from Mrs. James Drummond of Cherry Brook, October 1934. Nova Scotia Museum 34.197 (7954).

Figure 23. Drawing of basket in Figure 22. Nova Scotia Museum Accession Book V:62.

Traditional Uses of Withe



There are three main types of withe basketry made in Nova Scotia today: the garden-gathering and finer household baskets for sewing and knitting found in Lunenburg County, the clam baskets found on the Eastern Shore of Halifax County, and the eel traps found in both counties.

Bernard Mossman of Lower Kingsburg, Lunenburg County, (Fig. 24), is descended from Uriah Mossman, one of the original German settlers. He was never taught to weave; he learned by himself. "We had an old one, an' I took it apart, that's how I picked it up from then on. The old people, they all had these baskets because the fellas back then, like my father an' before him, they all could make 'em."[40]

The garden-gathering baskets (Fig. 25), woven mainly by retired fishermen, are similar to the fishing baskets carried on the schooners in days gone by. In fact, the majority of these baskets were sold to the schooner foremen. In those days, every vessel carrried eight to ten large baskets, which stood under the filleting tables. The tables had holes through which the cod livers were thrown into the baskets below. When they were full, they were emptied into a large oil can, a 'hogshead', which sat over a small coal fire to render the cod liver oil. A smaller version of this basket was used by the fishermen in their gardens to gather potatoes, turnips, and other vegetables, or to carry firewood.

These baskets are closely woven with carefully chosen withes. The bottoms are concave, with a protective rim to raise the basket off the ground. The upper rims are woven in complicated patterns and the handles are additional elements. When they are well taken care of, these baskets will last for years. "You gotta keep 'em dry, if they get wet, they get moldy. And another thing, they'll get wit-worms in 'em if they're put away wet. That's because the bark's on 'em, and the worms get in it."[41]

The knitting, sewing, and laundry baskets are woven with smaller shoots than those used in the garden baskets (Figs. 26 and 27). Young withes are cut in the early spring when the bark is sappy and can be peeled easily. The bottom framework of these smaller baskets consists of four intersecting sticks (Fig. 28), instead of six as in the larger containers; otherwise, they are woven in the same way. Mr. Mossman usually paints them with a coat of shellac to seal the wood and ". . . to make 'em look prettier."

Figure 24. Bernard Mossman, Lower Kingsburg, Lunenburg County.

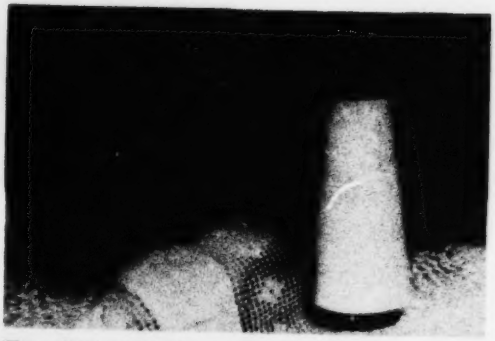


Figure 26. Sewing basket woven of fine peeled Witherod withes.

Figure 27. Knitting basket woven of fine peeled Witherod withes.

Figure 25. Garden-gathering Witherod basket woven by Bernard Mossman.

Figure 28. Bottom of sewing basket showing the intersection of four withes.

The clam basketmakers live along the Eastern Shore of Nova Scotia, from the outskirts of Dartmouth to the Oyster Pond area. One of them, Gerald Kent, now lives in Eastern Passage, but his family came from Ostrea Lake, farther up the shore (Fig. 29). Early in the spring he and his parents would go into the woods to cut Witherod for "Uncle Fred" to weave clam baskets. Fred Bowser was of German descent and lived in the Ostrea Lake region.

Clamming was an important source of income for many families. "At that time, in the spring of the year, the people used to dig barrels of clams. It took about four barrels, four or five barrels, of clams, round clams, to make a barrel of meat, after they were shelled out. They'd salt them and sell them to the Banks fishermen for about $3 or $4 a barrel."[42]

The men would go onto the flats just as they were beginning to dry out and dig until the tide came in and drove them off again. In that space of time they could collect three or four barrels of clams. The clams were dug with a clam hoe. "We used to take a manure fork and bend it around and put a little handle on it."[43]

The shellfish were collected in the baskets. Each man had two baskets. When they were full, the baskets were swished through the salt water in the channel and cleaned of sand before they were emptied into the barrels in the boat. The baskets were well used. "A basket of clams is pretty heavy. Then you come on to fishing, they would use them to pass herring up out of the boat onto the dock. Then come along in the fall, they would use them for digging potatoes, or maybe picking rocks out of a piece of the garden . . . the first thing that generally went was the handles pulled, you see. So, next spring, you'd get three or four new ones."[44] Gerald Kent learned how to make these baskets by experimenting on his own, after his mother tried her hand at weaving one spring when Fred Bowser was too busy to supply them.

The clam baskets (Fig. 30) are recognizable because of their loose weave, their flat bottoms, the simple rim construction, the absence of the bottom's protective rim, and the type of handle construction. These baskets can be made relatively quickly, and are not meant to last beyond one or two seasons.

Figure 29. Gerald Kent of Eastern Passage, Halifax County, with his Witherod clam basket.

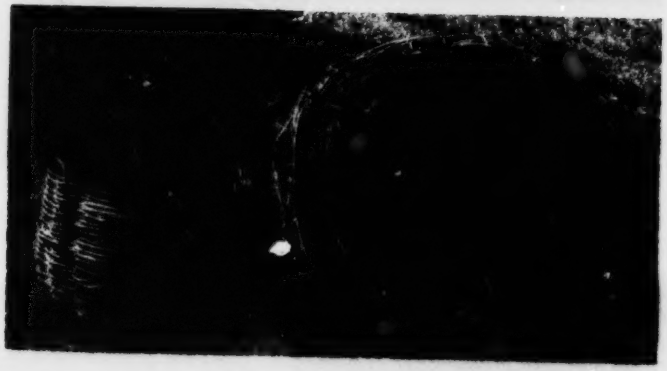


Figure 30. Two Witherod clam baskets woven by Gerald Kent. Note the oval shape of the basket and the open weave. Photo: J. Gordon.

Figure 31. Contemporary eel pot, wicker-woven by Carl Pettipas of East Chezzetcook, Halifax County. Photo: J. Gordon.

There are two styles of eel traps, or 'eel pots', woven in the province. On the Eastern Shore, some traps are made on a square piece of wood. Others are woven without the wood, similar to traps from the South Shore (Figs. 31 and 32).

William Bonin of West Chezzetcook explained why there were two kinds of traps. In that area of Chezzetcook Harbour, the old people used to weave what he referred to as 'round traps'. When they set them with a line and buoy in the channels between the eel beds, the strong tidal current caused the trap to roll. This wound up the rope and lowered the buoy. The men thus had no way of finding their traps. To solve this problem, they started making their traps on square pieces of wood that would not roll. The Chezzetcook area traps which lack this feature are set in inland bays and relatively quiet waters of the harbour. Farther up the Eastern Shore, in Oyster Pond, the eel traps are woven on the square of wood for a different reason. Here, the traps are set into a grid of wooden planks crossing the pond, the wood allowing the traps to be easily slipped in and out of place.

Most commercial eel fishermen in Nova Scotia today use the wire-mesh hardware cloth traps instead of the traditional withe traps.[45] As James Hatfield of Pleasant Lake in Yarmouth County reported, "When my father was a young man, all the eel traps were made of Witherods. He said they fished good, but soon went rotten and quite often mink or otter would tear a hole in them to get at the eels and they would lose the catch of eels and also have to repair the trap. They were also very heavy and awkward compared to the traps we make now."[46]

On the South Shore in Oakland, Lunenburg County, Russell Langille (Fig. 33) learned how to make withe baskets and eel traps by watching his father who had learned from one of the Maders in Mader's Cove. Russell and his father used to set one or two of the traps with ballast and buoy lines in two to three metres of water off their dock: "We'd put in clams or mackerel gibs, something like that for bait an', oh gosh, you'd get all kinds of eels."[47] The traps were not positioned with the tide, the eels being lured by the smell of the bait and their tendency to move away from light. "In July and August, those were the two best months; after that, the eels got, you know, there wasn't plenty of them. We used to fry them mostly . . . fry them a little brown, boy, they're the sweetest fishes going!"[48]

Figure 32. Two Witherod eel pots from the Chezzetcook area, with and without the square piece of wood at the mouth of the trap. Photo: J. Gordon.

Figure 33. Russell Langille of Oakland, Lunenburg County. Note the completed Witherod eel pot in the background and bunch of Witherods in the foreground.

Withes have been used in Nova Scotia for purposes other than basketry. The first curling games in the province were held in 1824 on the frozen ice of the Dartmouth lakes.[49] The game was introduced by Sir Houston Stewart, Captain of H.M.S. *Menai*, and by the Scottish stonemasons who came to work on the Shubenacadie Canal. The game was played with brooms made of withes bound together on a wooden handle, rather like those depicted in the print shown in Figure 34.

A similar broom was very popular on many Nova Scotian farms for sweeping the barns and outbuildings.[50] They are still being made today by a few men in Nova Scotia. The broomhead is constructed by cutting a large handful of approximately one-metre lengths of bushy branches of Witherod, alder, or birch. Among the broom-makers, Witherod appears to be the preferred wood because of its strength and durability. The stalks are bound together with a traditional piece of withe, or the more common galvanized wire. The butt ends are cut even, and the sharpened end of the handle, debarked and shaved smooth, is shoved down between the rods to a depth of about 25 cm. Poplar is the preferred wood for the handle because of its light weight, although spruce, fir, and maple are also used.

The manufacture of these brooms once was part of the livelihood of the Black people who lived near the Halifax-Dartmouth area. Some brooms were sold at the Halifax market (Figs. 35 and 36). Clifford Clayton of East Preston (Fig. 37) still makes brooms, and knows their history in his community: "Yes, quite a few people used to make them around here. A lot of people used to

Figure 34. 'Curling in the Maritimes — 1860' from an original sketch by Henry B. Laurence. Lithograph published 1870. Dartmouth Heritage Museum, Dartmouth, N.S.

sell them years ago, they sold them at the stables and places like that."[51] Although they no longer supply their traditional buyers, the few remaining broom-makers now sell to the historic sites of Sherbrooke Village, The Habitation at Port Royal, and the Fortress on Citadel Hill in Halifax (Fig. 38).

Figure 35. 'City Market Place (Halifax) pre-1891'. Note the bundles of brush brooms and the wagons loaded with brush, possibly for garden-pea supports. Nova Scotia Museum collection.

Figure 36. Detail of a photograph taken before 1890 at the Halifax Ferry Terminal, showing a man with two bundles of brush brooms. Dartmouth Heritage Museum.

Figure 37. Clifford Clayton of Eastern Preston, Halifax County, with one of his handmade brooms.

Figure 38. Withe broom at The Habitation in Port Royal, Annapolis County. Photo: J. Gordon.

An interesting use of Witherod was described to me by an informant in Lunenburg County[52]. She told me that her father, along with several other folk in the village, used pieces of Witherod to locate water by 'water witching' or dowsing. Dowsing is a mysterious process of finding underground water sources which no one seems able to explain except to say that it is remarkably successful for some people. The water dowser holds a Y-shaped piece of withe by the two shorter ends. The longer end projects at right angles from the body. As the dowser approaches water, the wood bends down toward the earth.

Wreaths

People in the Black communities surrounding the Halifax-Dartmouth area have been making Christmas wreaths for several years using Witherod as the main foundation element and pieces of a clubmoss, 'Evergreen', *Lycopodium obscurum*, also known as Ground Pine. In some wreaths, Balsam Fir is substituted for 'Evergreen.' To make the wreath, a withe is bent into a circle, the ends are overlapped and tied tightly with string. If the butt end is too thick, the wood is cut. A long piece of string is tied to the wood and then bound tightly two or three times around three pieces of green, with one sprig in the centre on top of the wood and the other two on either side. Another bunch of green is laid on top and a little below the first group and then bound with string. In this way the circle of Witherod is completely covered. To add colour, a sprig of large rosehips, bordered on either side by the green, is added to the ring every so often. In some wreaths, whitish-gray clusters of reindeer moss, *Cladonia* sp.,[53] are included behind the rosehips to give a pleasing colour combination and texture. Another favourite addition is the Pearly Everlasting flower, *Anaphalis margaritacea* which is either left in its natural colour or dyed with commercial dyes.[54]

Fish weirs, remarkably similar to the Micmac Indian ones described earlier, are still being made today in some areas of the Bay of Fundy. Although they are not composed of withes, the wicker-weaving technique is similar, and its presence as a traditional craft should be documented.

James Webb makes his fish weir off Economy Point each spring, having learned the art from his father who had a weir off Five Islands. In early March, Mr. Webb cuts and sharpens 600 softwood stakes, 2.5 and 3.5 metres long. The weir is semi-circular with the longer stakes placed in the bend and the shorter ones on the wings (Fig. 39). The work must be done at low tide. "From the time the tide leaves the weir site until it's back again, it's from two and a half to three hours. In that short time you have to work hard and fast."[55] It usually takes him about a month to pound the upright stakes one metre into the mud, spacing them about one metre apart, and then weaving them with brush (Fig. 40). "Next comes the softwood brush, mostly spruce. This type of tree weaves fairly easily. There are two rows of softwood brush on the bottom next to the mud. The purpose of this is to hold the fish back as they can't swim through the branches. Now comes the hardwood brush. Birch is the best hardwood, but it is getting scarce to find. From the top of the softwood to the top of the stakes is all hardwood."[56] The weir catches codfish in the spring, then flounder, followed by sturgeon, gaspereau, and then the biggest catch, shad. By November, the rough tides and strong winds pull out the stakes and scatter the brush, ending the fishing season. In the winter the snow and ice completely ruin the weir so that it must be rebuilt again in the spring.

Figure 40. Close-up of the Webb fish trap, showing the thicker softwood brush at the bottom and the hardwood brush above. Photo: J. Gordon.

Figure 39. Woven fish trap owned by James Webb of Economy, Colchester County. Photo: D. C. Gordon.

There is no such thing as a pair of baskets.
Old English Workshop Saying

Figure 41. Three views of English basketmakers in the early nineteenth century. 7: Weaving a Basket. 8: Making a Bottle Basket. 9: Making a Clothes Basket. W. H. Pyne, 1977, Plate 97.

Garden Basket Instructions

"We had an old one, an' I took it apart, that's how I picked it up from then on."

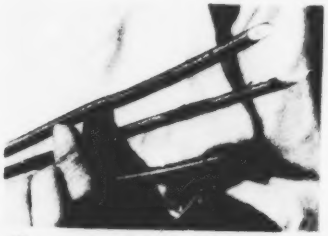
The instructions for making this style of withe basket were collected from Bernard Mossman of Lower Kingsburg in Lunenburg County. I first met Mr. Mossman in Bridgewater when he was demonstrating at the Des Brisay Museum in 1978. Since that time I have spent several afternoons with him learning how to recognize the Witherods and how to construct the baskets. He makes a closely woven basket with carefully chosen withes. When low on material, he will travel out of his way to find Witherod, rather than use other withes.

The tools Mr. Mossman uses include a curved knife for cutting the withes, a jack-knife for preparing the shoots, an awl to open the weave for easier placement of side-framework rods and twine (Fig. 42). This basket is woven in three steps — the bottom, the sides and upper rim, and lastly the bottom rim.

42

Select six stout pieces of withe, the length of which should be cut to the desired diameter of the finished basket. Cut all six pieces to the same length. Divide the wood into two groups of three and lay them with their butt and tip ends alternating. "At one end, you will have thick, thin, thick; and thin, thick, thin on the other" (Fig. 43).[57]

Take one group of three withes and cut a slit through the centre of each piece with a jack-knife (Fig. 44). Insert the first of the uncut withes through this slit (Fig. 45), then the second and third. Gently slip the two remaining cut withes over the uncut ones, keeping their original order of placement (Fig. 46). Adjust all six sticks so they intersect in the middle.



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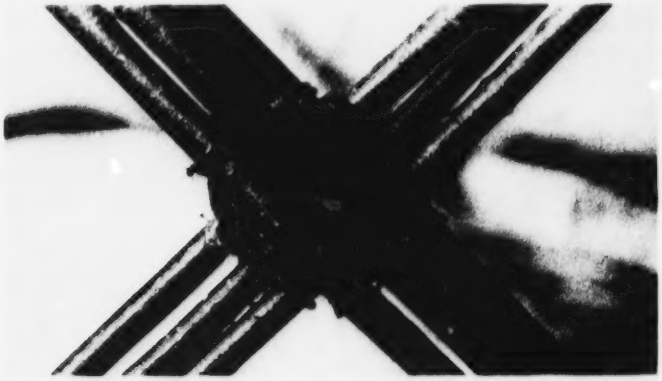
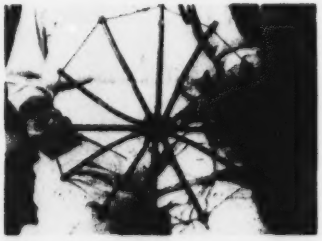
To hold the withes in place and also to prevent the slits from enlarging, tie a piece of twine around one withe and wind the twine around each of the sticks for two complete circles. Tie tightly and cut off (Fig. 47).



Radiate the sticks into a full circle, adjusting them so that they are equally spaced. Hold them in place by tying a length of twine around the end of each stick and then looping it around each consecutive stick in a half-hitch knot (Fig. 48), pulling it tightly to give the framework a concave shape or what Mr. Mossman refers to as a 'belly' (Figs. 49 and 50).

48



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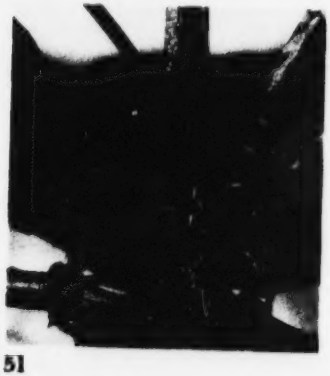
50

This is the framework around which the thinner withes are woven. For the first few rows, select very fine withes to produce tight weaving. The withes are always woven in pairs (Fig. 51). Insert the ends into the centre intersection and weave them around each consecutive framework withe in a clockwise direction, twisting them once in a clockwise half-turn between each stick (Fig. 52).



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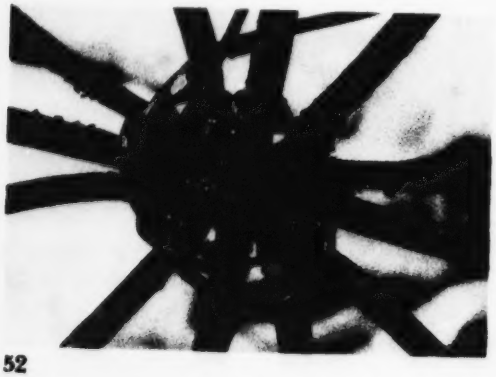


52

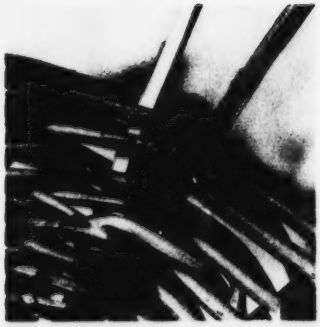
When the length of each withe is almost completely woven, add a new one by firmly pushing its sharpened, tapered end into the weave alongside one of the framework sticks (Fig. 53), and use this new withe in place of the old one. Slip the tail end of the old withe down into the weave in the same way as the new one was added. Continue weaving, adding new withes when necessary. When the bottom is half woven, remove the outer cord and continue weaving. When the bottom is completely woven, slip the two remaining ends of withe down into the weave.

53

Select 24 straight long withes which have roughly the same diameter — smaller than the bottom framework sticks, but larger than those used in weaving the bottom. Sharpen the butt ends into long, tapering points and firmly shove one withe into the bottom weave on either side of each framework stick (Fig. 54). Gather the free ends of these long withes together at a point above the centre of the concave-shaped bottom (Fig. 55).

Adjust the sticks so that the lengths between the bottom and the point where they are held is roughly the same. Bind them tightly with twine. To create a fullness in the sides of the basket, tie a length of cord between the centre of the bottom and the cord binding the side withes together and shorten this cord until the basket reaches the desired fullness. Bind tightly (Fig. 56). Hold the basket between the knees while sitting on a chair or low stool and weave the sides in the same way as the bottom (Fig. 57).

Weave about half-way up the sides before removing the cord binding the side-framework withes together. Continue weaving to the desired height of the basket, leaving at least 30 cm of the side withes unwoven. These will be used for weaving the rim. The upper rim is woven in three complete counter-clockwise rounds.



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57

Bend each consecutive withe to the right bringing it behind the next two withes, and around them to the outside of the basket (Fig. 58). Hold firmly in place with the thumb (Fig. 59).

58

59

At the end of the round, bend the second-last withe behind the last standing stick and under the next one which was the first to be woven (Fig. 60). Similarly, weave the remaining upright withe under the second woven withe to the right (Fig. 61). At the end of round one, the outside of the rim looks like that in Figure 62.

61

62

Bend each withe over the rim, behind the next two woven withes on the right hand to the outside of the basket between the second and third withes so that it lies on the right-hand side of the stick already in that space. The withes become paired; always use the one on the left which is the one that has not yet been woven (Fig. 63).

63

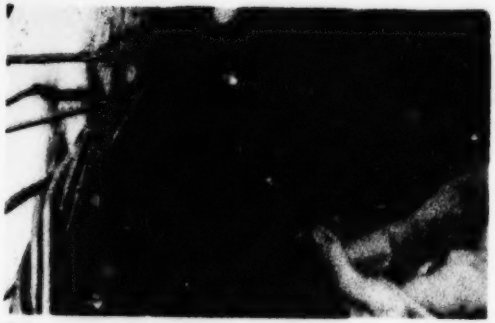
Round Three

Bend each withe to the right, over the adjacent horizontal one and into the space to the left of the next side-framework stick (Fig. 64).

Cut, leaving a 5 cm 'tail' on the inside to prevent the weaving from unravelling as the wood dries and shrinks (Fig. 65).

Continue weaving and cutting for the perimeter of the basket (Fig. 66). The upper rim is now complete (Fig. 67).

64



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67

The purpose of this rim is to raise the basket off the ground and so prevent wet rot. The construction is the same as the upper rim.

Select 24 pieces of withe approximately the same length. They should be the same diameter as the side withes. Sharpen each butt end into a long, tapering point and shove one stick into the weave on either side of the paired side-framework withes (Fig. 68). Use an awl to make the placement of these withes easier (Fig. 69).

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Continue around the bottom of the basket (Fig. 70). Weave the rim using the same directions for the upper rim, rounds one to three (Figs. 71 to 75).

Cut off the remaining withes, leaves a 5 cm end close to the inside of the rim (Fig. 76). The bottom rim is complete (Fig. 77).

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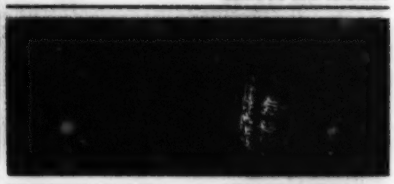
Handles

The handles — either one long handle stretching across the basket or two smaller ones, one on each side — are always added last. The foundation element is a piece of withe similar in diameter to the bottom framework sticks, the ends of which are sharpened and shoved down into the side weave with the aid of an awl and then wrapped securely with heavy twine (Figs. 78 and 79).

78

79

Clam Basket Instructions



"A basket of clams is pretty heavy. . . . the first thing that generally went was the handles pulled, you see. So, next spring, you'd get three or four new ones."

The clam basket woven by Gerald Kent of Eastern Passage, Halifax County, is similar to the garden basket, but there are a few differences in the method of construction.

The bottom framework consists of six withes intersecting one another, twine-woven with pairs of finer withes, and is flat, not concave. The side withes are inserted into the bottom weave, one alongside each framework stick, not paired (Fig. 80). They are gathered and tied together without using the central cord, giving straight sides to the basket rather than a fullness. The weaving is done with pairs of withes, twisting them once in a clockwise half-turn between each framework stick (Fig. 81).

80

81

The ends of withe are not bent downwards into the weave, but overlap with new shoots. The rim is made by bending all but three withes on either side of the basket horizontally to the right, inserting each down alongside the adjacent framework stick and pulling it out on the bottom of the basket where it is cut off (Fig. 82). The remaining six withes are twisted together to form a handle, their ends being shoved down through the side weave and cut off.

82

Eel Trap Instructions

"We'd put in clams or mackerel gibs, something like that for bait an', oh gosh, you'd get all kinds of eels."

The directions for making an eel trap were collected from Russell Langille of Oakland in Lunenburg County. Mr. Langille weaves both baskets and traps usually of Witherod, but he does use withes of cherry, willow, and alder if Witherod is scarce. His tools include a sharp knife, twine, and two wooden molds. The eel trap is woven in two stages: firstly, the inner funnel, and then the larger outer funnel.

The inner funnel is woven on withes inserted through holes cut in a square piece of wood, spacing them equally in the shape of a circle. Mr. Langille's template is cut with three concentric circles of holes for three sizes of traps. The day we visited him, he wove on the smallest circle.

Select ten pieces of withe the same length and thickness. Insert them through the holes in the wooden template and tie their butt ends together about 30 to 36 cm from the wood, leaving the remaining rods sticking out the other end (Figs. 83 and 84).

83

84

This is the framework for the inner funnel. Brace each butt end of two thinner withes behind each of two consecutive framework sticks and begin twine-weaving, giving the two withes a clockwise half-turn between each upright (Fig. 85). When the length of withe is completely woven, add a new one by bracing its butt end behind a framework stick and overlap the old and new withes for a few centimetres (Fig. 86).

The butt ends of the withes are often thick and must be cut to about half their thickness, or 'sniped' as Mr. Langille says, before adding them to the weave with their cut side facing inwards (Fig. 87).[58]

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Continue weaving to about halfway up the funnel. Then, in order to bring the weaving together in a cone shape, cut out four sticks. Do not cut every second one as there are ten sticks in all, but make the cuts according to the spaces between the withes (Fig. 88). Remove the twine binding the withes together. Weave the remaining six withes, pushing them inwards (Fig. 89).

88

89

Cut the ends of the withes into long, tapering, sharp points (Fig. 90). Remove the completed funnel from the piece of wood (Fig. 91). To prevent the weaving unravelling with extended use, bind galvanized wire over the last four or five rows (Fig. 92).

91

92

Slip the inner funnel over a mold made of a wooden pole with four triangular pieces of wood nailed to one end at right angles to one another (Fig. 93). Shove the mold into the woven funnel as far as it will go. Then bend each of the unwoven withes outwards close to the base of the mold to ensure that they will bend in that spot when they are gathered up later to form the outer funnel of the trap, or what Mr. Langille calls 'the bedroom' or 'the parlor' (Fig. 94).

93

94

Add ten more withes of equal diameter to the inner framework by shoving their sharpened butt ends deep into the weave alongside each framework stick of the smaller funnel (Fig. 95). Bend each of the 20 withes up and over the inner funnel, holding them in place against the handle of the mold (Fig. 96).

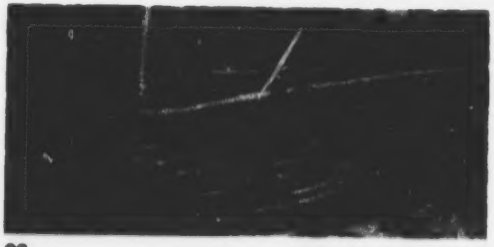
Tie the withes tightly to the handle and gently pull out each piece to the desired shape of the trap (Fig. 97).

95

96

97

Begin triple-twining: brace the sniped ends of the three withes behind three consecutive framework rods and weave the withe on the far left in front of the next two framework sticks, in behind the third one, and through to the outside again. Repeat, using the withe on the far left (Fig. 98). Add new withes by sniping the butt ends and laying them behind a framework stick overlapping the new and the old withe for a few centimetres. In this manner, weave up the outer part of the trap, pressing each new row of weaving down with the hands while holding the trap firmly between the knees. (Figs. 99 and 100).



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100

Near the top of the trap, thin the number of withes in order to draw the weaving into a conical shape by cutting out five, six, or as many as ten withes, depending on the size of the trap and the desired size of the opening. Cut the withes close to the last row of weaving (Fig. 101). Continue weaving until the full height of the trap is reached (Fig. 102). With a piece of wood and a hammer, pound the last row of weaving down to tighten the weave (Fig. 103).

Weave the rim in three complete counter-clockwise circles, similar to the rim in the garden basket.

101

102

103

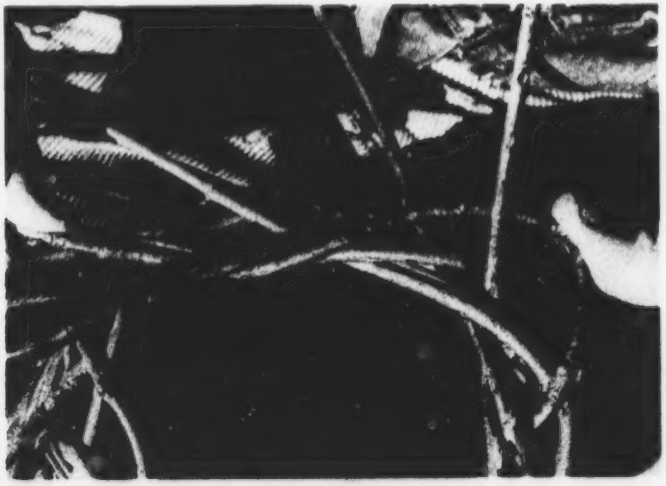
Bend each consecutive withe to the right, bringing it behind the next two withes, and around them to the outside of the basket (Fig. 104). At the end of the row, weave the withes under those already woven at the beginning of the round (Fig. 105).

104

105

Round Two

Weave each consecutive stick under the one on the right, over the next two, and through the next space, from inside to outside (Fig. 106).



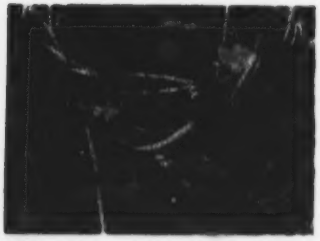
106

Bend each withe over the next two withes on the right and into the space between the second and third withes to the inside of the trap (Fig. 107). Sometimes the spacing of the withes is not regular, in which case the withe may pass over only one withe, or perhaps three, before being bent to the inside of the work.

Cut off the tail ends of the withes with a jack-knife, leaving at least a 3 cm end to prevent the weaving from unravelling as the withes shrink (Fig. 108).

Cut off all the loose ends on the outside of the trap with a jack-knife (Fig. 109).

Finally, carve a wooden plug to fit the opening of the trap and secure it with a rope inserted between the upper rows of weaving and through an eye bolt set in the middle of the plug (Figs. 110 and 111).



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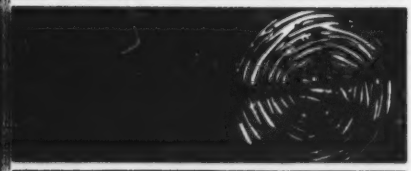


1 Gordon, 1977.

2 "Older than the weaving of cloth, more ancient than the early ceramic art, the interlacing of twigs into wickerwork is in all probability contemporary with the first slippings of flints into arrowheads by neolithic man." (Bobart, 1936/1971:1).

3 Bobart, 1936/1971; Rossbach, 1973; Wright, 1977.

4 This definition is given by Otis Mason, a North American Indian basketry researcher (1904:228). The same technique is referred to as 'randing' by an English basket researcher, Dorothy Wright (1959:34).

5 Mason, 1904:231. Wright calls this technique 'waling' (1959:36).

6 Wright, 1959:35. Mason does not refer to this weave.

7 'Souplejack' is another local name for withes used in The Narrows, Lunenburg County. Keddy, personal communication, March 1982.

8 *Viburnum cassinoides* L. ". . . common throughout, often abundant in swamps, wet barrens, open lowlands, and in all types of locations from peaty barrens to dry open areas and pastures." (Roland, 1947:560).

9 Mary Sparling discusses the prejudices which European artists incorporated in their early views of Nova Scotia (Sparling, 1980).

10 Harper, 1956:49: Whitehead, 1980:51.

11 Lescarbot, 1609/1928:284; Whitehead, 1980:67.

12 Lescarbot, 1609/1928:283; Denys, 1672/1908:437; Whitehead, 1980:67.

13 Wallis and Wallis, 1955:28.

14 Hardy, 1869:284.

15 Whitehead, personal communication, January 1983.

16 A general history of Acadia and of European settlement is given by Clark (1968).

17 Denys, 1672/1908:289.

18 The French coiled-straw basketry tradition is described by Martel (1978); the French willow basketry tradition is documented by Duchesne *et al.* (1981).

19 Wright, 1959:13. The English willow basketry tradition is documented by Wright (1959 and 1977); the German tradition by Will (1978); and the Dutch tradition by de Konig *et al.* (1980).

20 Arsenault, 1978; Deveau, 1980; Dupont, 1978. The *Musée Acadien* at the University of Moncton, New Brunswick, has an excellent collection of Acadian artifacts.

21 "Winnowing basket, wicker and wood; 900 × 1000 × 280 mm collected in the vicinity of Ferrette (Haut-Rhin), late nineteenth century" (Cuisenier *et al.*, 1979:53).

22 The species of willow (*Salix*) brought to Nova Scotia from Europe were reported by Roland (1947:321-328). They include *S. pentandra* L., the Bay-leafed Willow; *S. fragilis* L., the Crack willow; *S. alba* L., White Willow or 'French Willow'; *S. viminalis* L., Common Osier; and *S. purpurea* L. Purple Osier. Both *S. viminalis* and *S. purpurea* are cultivated in England today for basketry rods (Wright, 1977:10). Basket willow is exported from Poland, The Netherlands, Spain, Belgium, Madeira, Austria, Hungary, Germany, Argentina, and the Canary Islands (Wright, 1959:14,26)

23 Wright, 1977:23. These baskets are very similar to those woven by the Black weavers in Nova Scotia (Gordon, 1977).

24 Wright, 1977:23. One of these baskets, the *tandel*, was used as a legal measure by fishermen of the fifteenth century, its capacity long since forgotten (Bobart, 1936/1971:105). Today, the 'quarter cran' basket is ". . . the most familiar and widely used of English fish baskets, it is a government measure and each one bears the official stamp." These baskets must be woven to several specific measurements. Four of them hold a cran, approximately 3½ cwt (Wright, 1959:129).

25 The English withe fish traps are described by Wright (1977). Dupont (1978) told of a similar Acadian trap called a *bourne*. Mason (1904) shows an almost identical Pomo Indian withe trap. Von Brandt (1972) gives an excellent description of woven traps and weirs worldwide.

26 W. Tonge, Lt. Royal Fusiliers A.D.C., to his superior officer, 28 February 1802. William Inglis Morse Collection, Dalhousie University Archives, Halifax.

27 Raddall, 1947-1948:136; Raddall, 1948:124. Mr. Raddall also wrote a short story, *By Tellygraft*, based on the telegraph system.

28 Evans, 1949, 1957; Grant, 1961.

29 Burnham and Burnham, 1972:25.

30 Mackley, 1967:18. Both this author and the Burnhams report these baskets were also used for holding teased fleece prior to spinning, which is compatible with Grant's description (1961:233). In the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, it was known as a *creelagh* (Wright, 1959:132). In Ireland the basket was known as a 'yarn holder' and has been collected in Lough Neagh ". . . one of the oldest occupied areas of the country." (Evans, 1949:127).

31 Bell, 1961:300.

32 The coiled-straw bread-raising basket, the *brotkorb*, is described in Gordon, 1981:63.

33 Will, 1978.

34 "Baskets for household use were made from the pliant shoots of witherods." (Leopold, 1966:17).

35 In a study of traditional craftsmen in Nova Scotia, most of the withe basketweavers lived in Lunenburg County (Barss and Gordon, 1980).

36 "The Eastern Passage lands were chiefly settled by Germans. The fine farms in the district are the result of their careful toil. In each of the little coves are the families of fishermen, and these in the earliest years of the settlement supplied the Halifax market with fish." (Lawson, 1893/1972:90).

37 Mrs. Edith Clayton of East Preston recalls that Mr. Fairfax and Mr. Bundy, both of Cherry Brook, wove Witherod baskets. Sometimes they would give one of their baskets to her mother, Mrs. James Drummond, to sell for them at the Halifax city market. Mrs. Drummond herself never wove Witherod baskets, only the red-maple ribbed baskets (personal communication, May 1980)

38 "In June, 1750, the Governor and Council assigned as a site the spot on which the old City Court House stands, for a market for black cattle, sheep, etc., and made market regulations." (Akins, 1895/1973:26).

39 Blakeley, 1949:65-66.

40 Lawson, 1893/1972:189.

41 Blakeley, 1949:66.

42 Mossman, personal communication, October 1978.

43 *Ibid.*

44 Kent, personal communication, July 1980.

45 *Ibid;* also Bonin, personal communication, March 1981.

46 Kent, personal communication, July 1980. Mr. Kent has written an interesting account of his life at sea, *Autobiography of Captain W. Gerald Kent,* available at the Dartmouth Heritage Museum, Dartmouth, N.S.

47 For descriptions of traditional and contemporary eel traps and their methods of use in Nova Scotia, see Eales, 1968; Jennex, 1976; Tesch, 1977.

48 Hatfield, personal communication, March 1981.

49 Langille, personal communication, March 1981.

50 *Ibid.*

51 Martin, 1957:140.

52 For a description of these brooms, or 'besoms', in England, see Arnold, 1968:96; Manners, 1974:22. For their manufactures and use in the Appalachian Mountains of the United States, see Stephenson, 1977:101.

53 C. Clayton, personal communication, May 1980.

54 Tumblin, personal communication, September 1981.

55 *Cladonia*, or reindeer moss, includes a number of species. The two which are most commonly used in Christmas wreaths are *C. terraenovae* and *C. alpestris*.

56 Edith Clayton, personal communication, December 1972.

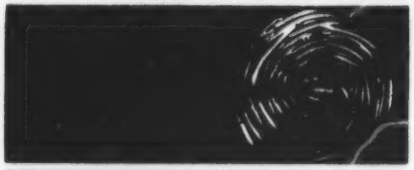
57 Webb and Webb, personal communication, December 1981.

58 2Ibid.

59 Mossman, personal communication, October 1978.

60 The word 'snipe' sounds very similar to the English basketry term 'slype', and has the same meaning: a slanting cut (Wright, 1977:35).

Acknowledgements



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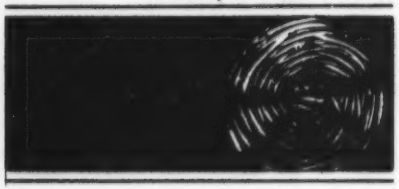

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Clifford Clayton, East Preston, Halifax County.
Edith Clayton, East Preston, Halifax County.
James Hatfield, Pleasant Lake, Yarmouth County.
Frank Keddy, Blockhouse, Lunenburg County.
Gerald Kent, Eastern Passage, Halifax County.
Russell Langille, Oakland, Lunenburg Count
Bernard Mossman, Lower Kingsburg, Lunenburg County.
Mona Tumblin, New Germany, Lunenburg County.
James and Tena Webb, Economy, Colchester County.
Ruth Whitehead, Nova Scotia Museum, Halifax.

Making baskets from locally available natural materials was an important skill in many Nova Scotian communities. Witherod, with its long pliant shoots was a favoured material used by many traditional basket weavers, particularly fishermen.

In **Withe Baskets, Traps and Brooms** Joleen Gordon examines the development of this type of basketry in Nova Scotia from its earliest occurrences until the present day.